

Derelict Fishing Gear Removal

Derelict fishing gear cleaned up as part of Marine Outfall project

Our growing region needs a new wastewater treatment system called Brightwater to protect public health and the environment. The system includes an outfall to release highly treated water a mile offshore and 600 feet deep in the Puget Sound. As part of the marine outfall project, King County provided \$25,000 to the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative to organize the removal of several derelict fishing nets and crab pots around Puget Sound.

Why is King County providing funding for derelict gear removal?

The Washington Department of Natural Resources established permit conditions including a fishing gear removal program to mitigate for temporary loss of eelgrass habitat and impacts to the marine environment during marine outfall construction.

In a similar mitigation effort for the Vashon Island Wastewater Treatment Plant project, King County removed 5.3 acres of derelict fishing gear from Colvos Passage.

Why is derelict fishing gear a problem?

Crab pots can be lost when boats cut through anchor lines, and nets can become entangled on underwater features. According to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) estimates, hundreds of tons of abandoned fishing nets, lines and crab pots in Puget Sound indiscriminately trap and kill birds, fish, marine mammals – even divers – who become entangled. Derelict fishing gear is also dangerous to swimmers and boaters. Nets can smother marine life growing on rocks or the seafloor, while crab pots pushed by tides along the nearshore can scrape through sensitive eelgrass beds and destroy habitat.

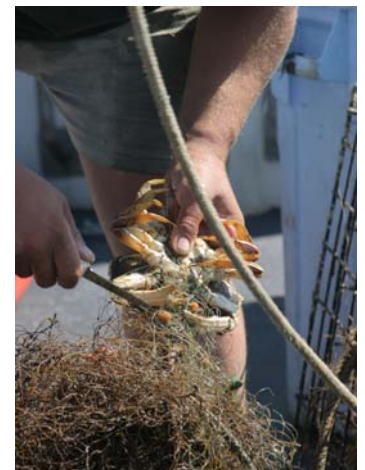
Improved fishing practices and “no fault” reporting policies have significantly reduced the time newly abandoned or lost gear persists in the Puget Sound.

How did the derelict gear program work?

King County provided funding to Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative, which contracted with Natural Resources Consultants, a firm with extensive experience removing derelict fishing gear in Puget Sound. NRC carried out two phases of gear removal, one to remove nets and the second to collect crab pots. All gear had been identified and located previously. NRC summarized the removal project in a report that King County provided to WA DNR prior to marine outfall construction.

What were the results?

The project focused on areas near Point Wells, where the Brightwater Marine Outfall is being constructed in 2008. One derelict gillnet was removed from Boeing Creek and six derelict gillnets were removed from the Duwamish Waterway. The net removed from the Boeing Creek area was located on an artificial reef popular with recreational divers.



An entangled crab is removed from a net

The seven derelict gillnets removed had a total surface area of 4,230 sq. ft. Six of the seven derelict nets contained at least one live or dead entangled animal. A total of 111 animals representing six species were attached or entangled in the derelict nets.

Side scan sonar surveys provided locations of crab pots near the Point Wells project area. From Port Gardner near Mukilteo to Shilshole Marina, over 100 potential targets were identified. Over three days in spring, divers removed 71 crab pots, one shrimp pot and five crab rings. Thirty-six percent of the gear was still actively fishing, and 76 crabs were discovered live or dead in the pots. Over 80% of the pots were either damaging eelgrass beds or impacting eelgrass growth.

Removing derelict fishing gear provides immediate environmental benefits

Cleaning up “ghost” fishing gear immediately and permanently removes a potential killer from the marine environment. Once gear is gone, people and animals that use the area are no longer at risk from entanglement or entrapment. In addition, cleanup alleviates habitat impacts such as damage to eelgrass beds and smothering of marine life and plants.



For more information on derelict fishing gear:

WDFW can provide more information about derelict fishing gear on the Web at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/derelict/>

Information about the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative, including derelict fishing gear removal projects, can be found at: <http://nwstraits.org/>

People can also call the WDFW Derelict Fishing Gear Hotline: 1-800-477-6224.

This information is available in alternative formats upon request by calling 206-296-1328 or Relay Service 711